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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2018

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SUBJECT: MELES ON ETHIOPIAN PLANS TO "REDEPLOY" FROM SOMALIA

REF: ADDIS 718

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (S) Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told Ambassador Yamamoto on April 3 that Ethiopia is looking to "redeploy" its approximately 2,500 troops in Somalia to the Ethiopian towns of Dolo Odo and Ferfer along the Ethiopia-Somalia border. While there are some factors aggravating Ethiopia's experience in Somalia which the Ethiopian Government (GoE) can influence, other stronger dynamics outside of the range of Ethiopia's control or influence will force the GoE's hand. Ultimately, Meles said, if Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) cannot, or will not, control internal Somali dynamics, the GoE will not be able to control them.

12. (S) Among those aggravating factors which Ethiopia can influence, but not control, according to Meles, are the slow pace of training TFG security forces and civil servants, the pace of equipment procurement, contributions to the African Union's Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and internal cohesion within the TFG itself. While the GoE continues to seek to positively influence these dynamics, the dynamics outside of the GoE's realm of influence -- particularly de facto control over parts of Mogadishu, Kismayo, and the Lower Juba Valley, as well as the TFG's pursuit of actual governance objectives -- are the key issues that will ultimately dictate Somalia's, and the TFG's, viability.

13. (S) In a separate meeting April 4, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu told the Ambassador that redeployment of troops would be in the near future and that there is consensus within the government for the redeployment. Tekeda added that TFG President Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Adde have been informed of this decision. Tekeda echoed what the Prime Minister stated earlier, and said Ethiopia will remain engaged in meeting privately with moderate elements of the Islamic Courts. He noted Ethiopia's private meetings with Q former Parliamentary Speaker Sheikh Sharif in Dubai last year and other meetings with moderate elements which now support or form the ARS. Tekeda added that the GoE would continue training TFG troops and would work out a mechanism for the protection of Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers in Mogadishu. While Ethiopian troops would be redeployed just over the border in Ethiopia, Tekeda stressed, as did the Prime Minister, that the troops would be available to reach parts of Somalia, if necessary.

COMMENT

14. (S) Meles did not give a timeline for implementation of this "redeployment," but hinted that it would not be too long in the future. Still, persistent messages from the GoE highlight a growing frustration over the sustained costs, in both lives and money, incurred by the GoE in the absence of tangible actions to bolster safety, stability, and governance in Somalia. It is possible that rather than indicating a specific plan to withdraw, Meles' message is more intended to spark additional USG support -- either in response to the \$17 million request submitted to offset the costs of training TFG police and troops (reftel), or more kinetic efforts to respond to the jihadist expansion in the Lower Juba Valley. Tekeda was more equivocal in urging the U.S. to do more and to get the international community to do more to stabilize and support Somalia. At the same time, it is increasingly evident that in the absence of tangible developments in Somalia and additional international support to offset Ethiopia's security and financial burdens from intervening in Somalia, the GoE faces ever diminishing popular support to sustain a status quo engagement in Somalia. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO